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CEO takes Six
Degrees helm p6

BT Wholesale chief on
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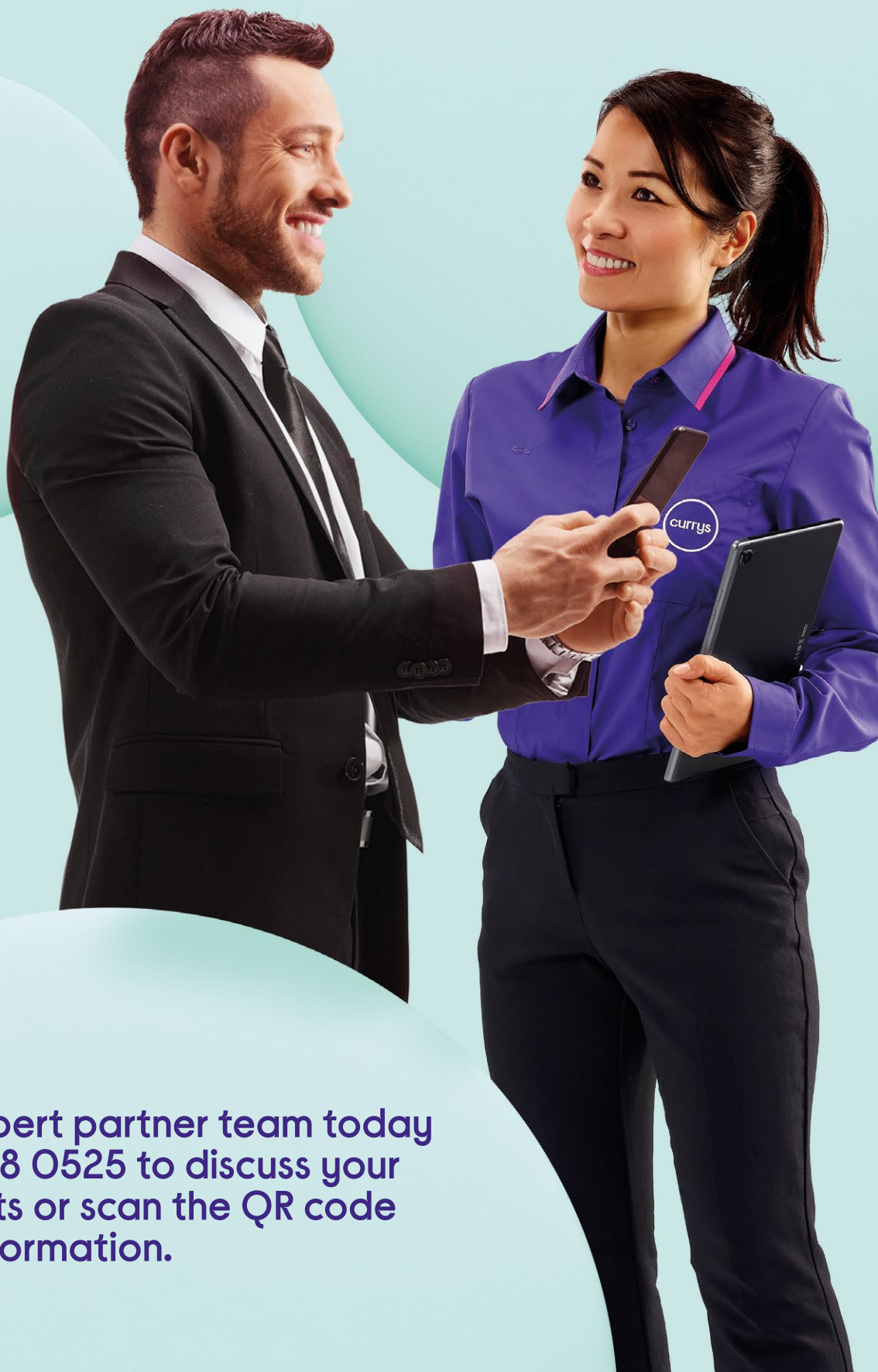
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Merger creates new MSP giant

THE merger of Macquarie Capital-backed Wavenet and Daisy Corporate Services has created the largest independent MSP with circa £450m revenue, 2,000 staff and 22,000 customers.

SPECIAL REPORT

The enlarged group will operate under the Wavenet brand, focus on delivering cyber, cloud and intelligent network solutions to private and public sector organisations, and be spearheaded by Wavenet CEO Philip Grannum (pictured).

Daisy CEO Neil Thompson is to leave the business and Daisy Chairman Matthew Riley joins the new board as Non-Executive Director,

with Wavenet Chairman Bill Dawson continuing in his current role.

Grannum stated: "By combining our strengths, resources and expertise we are poised to create a stronger and more innovative organisation, well positioned to maximise on the rising tide markets of cyber, cloud and intelligent comms."

The deal to combine two of the channel's most active consolidators sees Macquarie become the largest sharehold-

er; and with a £1bn-plus valuation, £450m revenues and £100m EBITDA the transaction signifies growing interest from investors in the MSP space, according to Megabyte Chief Analyst Philip Carse.

"This deal came soon after the Hg-backed Focus-SBO announcement which was notable for the interest shown by large PE investors that had not previously invested in the UK comms sector," he said.

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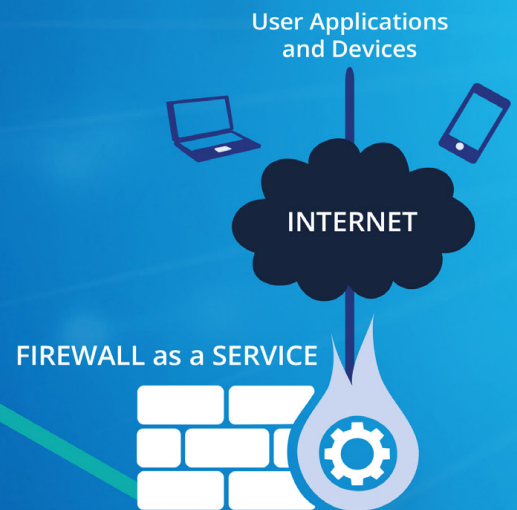
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Welcome comment



Stuart Gilroy

AS A RESELLER or traditional MSP, how do you cater for organisations immersed in a multi-faceted and fast evolving technology landscape? That's a question I ask myself more and more, because a big transition is well under way and rapidly reshaping the channel.

Not too long ago, whenever I dived into the idea of writing a feature on security and its implications for the comms channel, I drew a blank in terms of finding contributors. Now, cybersecurity awareness has become mainstream and the transition from concept to market reality was quick. Rewind the clock to when we first started talking about VoIP, UC and cloud – that was so many years ago we can barely remember the start of it. Today, emerging technologies like AI infiltrate so much faster. Then we have 5G and IoT at a gallop and enriched integrations and automations in growing demand. The list goes on.

What does all this mean for the channel, and how best can we put these technologies to work? This question feeds directly into another major theme that's also emerging fast – capability, and the requirement for traditional resellers who are in it for the long-term to evolve as MSPs.

Comms Dealer is privileged to be in a position to sense the wind's direction ahead of the main blast and read between the lines of tech trends. This is also true of many other important areas like ESG for example. The point is that the span of time between the emergence of change-drivers and full blown reality is drastically shrinking and accelerating. And the sector's superfast evolution will always be reflected in the pages of this magazine as we explore how the channel responds to the challenges it faces and opportunities at your fingertips.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

To keep up to date with the latest channel news, as it happens, visit www.comms-dealer.com daily

Congrats to top champs



Core Technology Systems celebrates a trio of awards

HATS off to Core Technology Systems which scooped a hat-trick of top gongs at this year's alfresco Channel Champions Awards (July 4th, Regents Park, London) including the highly prized Reseller Marketing Team and Overall Team of the Year awards.

Staged by Comms Dealer and headline sponsored by Giacom, the afternoon's big winners also included Fidelity Group which chalked up four wins while ANS Group and ProVu Communications each collected a brace of awards.

The event was hosted by radio and TV presenter Jason

Mohammad and celebrates all teams that make up channel organisations, as well as recognising team-led achievements in critical areas such as ESG, organisational culture and apprenticeships.

Core Technology Systems Marketing Director Katie Sloan enthused: "Receiving the prestigious Overall Team of the Year award was not only a wonderful surprise but an extraordinary accolade."

See pages 27-29 for the full winners list and photo spread.

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

Editor's picks

• Continued from page 1
"These deals show a positive outlook by private equity given an improving, or at least not worsening, macro and interest rate environment, and that investors are willing to back IT and comms service providers growing their businesses well above £100m EBITDA. This is highly likely to encourage further consolidation and it seems probable that large PE funds will want to talk to the enlarged Wavenet in the not too distant future."

GAMMA'S CCaaS play in the large enterprise and public sector space across Europe received a boost with the acquisition of top Cisco partner BrightCloud, which has a large estate of Cisco contact centre installations and Webex CCaaS. Gamma CEO Andrew Belshaw stated: "BrightCloud has a strong reputation in the Cisco ecosystem and expertise in supporting CCaaS implementations and CX transformations."



Andrew Belshaw



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Editor's picks

LAST month's unprecedented global IT outages caused by cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike highlight the vulnerability in using a single supplier on a large scale and proved 'nauseating to fix', according to Tom Kidwell, a former British Army and UK Government intelligence specialist, IT expert and co-founder of Ecliptic Dynamics. "Incidents like this highlight why it's critical that organisations have a backup plan. Best practice for vendors is to pressure test any updates before roll out – however this can be difficult when you serve 60-90% of the world." The outage was a 'timely reminder' that operational resilience should be at the forefront of the business agenda, noted Evolve CEO Alan Stephenson-Brown. "Even large corporations aren't immune to IT troubles," he said. "By prioritising contingency planning and preventative measures IT systems can be protected. I urge business leaders to seriously appraise the systems they have in place to identify potential vulnerabilities before they find themselves the subject of the next IT outages headline."

OFCOM'S Director of Network Security and Resilience Policy Nihal Newman is to join the ITP (Institute of Telecommunications Professionals) as Patron. She is a member of Ofcom's Operations Board, Senior Leadership Group and Technology Profession; and in 2023 led Ofcom's initiative to unite some of the UK's top telecoms organisations to sign a Women in Tech pledge, promoting the role of women in technology-based roles in the telecoms sector. "My passion lies



Nihal Newman

in addressing the sector-wide challenge of creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce," she said. "By combining this with my drive for sector-wide change I can support the ITP in developing talent that helps us grow a thriving telecoms industry." ITP CEO Charlotte Goodwill added: "Nihal's expertise and dedication to advancing diversity and inclusion in the telecoms industry aligns with our mission."

TSG's picked up by Pictet

CEO news

AVAYA'S President and CEO Alan Masarek is to retire at the end of the year and current Chair of the Board of Directors, Patrick Dennis, will assume the role of CEO on 1st September. He is currently CEO of Venafi, a cybersecurity company being acquired by CyberArk. Prior to that Dennis was the CEO of ExtraHop and CEO of Aspect Communications. He became Chair of the Avaya Board as the firm emerged from its recapitalisation in May 2023 and worked closely with Masarek and the leadership team on developing the vendor's strategy and growth plans.

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PICTET Group's private equity arm has acquired Newcastle-based Microsoft Solutions Partner Technology Services Group (TSG).



Rory McKeand

TSG also has offices in London and Glasgow, a 250-plus headcount and a circa 1,300 customer base.

Andrzej Sokolowski, Head of UK for Direct Private Equity, Pictet, stated: "TSG has an attractive and defensible business model, a high proportion of recurring revenue and customers that value its service and technical expertise.

Pictet acquired TSG from the original founder owners Sir Graham Wylie and David Stonehouse, and from management, with the management team reinvesting as part of the transaction.

"We see significant potential to increase TSG's growth organically and via M&A. That includes solution areas in Azure, Dynamics and cybersecurity, as well as accelerating the deployment of AI tools."

TSG CEO Rory McKeand added: "Pictet's investment and hands-on partnership will catalyse the next stage of our growth. With the penetration of cloud services among UK SMEs increasing rapidly from a low base, and a new generation of Microsoft productivity tools becoming available, there's ongoing demand for our services across a large addressable market."

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Editor: Stuart Gilroy
sgilroy@bpl-business.com 07712 781 102

Editorial Director: Nigel Sergent
nsergent@bpl-business.com 07712 781 106

Deputy Editor: Greg Denholm
gdenholm@bpl-business.com 07853 184 471

Managing Director: Michael O'Brien
mobrien@bpl-business.com 01895 454 444

Sales Director: Simon Turton
sturton@bpl-business.com 07759 731 134

Business Development Manager: Heather Miles
hmiles@bpl-business.com 07955 313 700

Production: Frank Voeten
fvoeten@bpl-business.com

Circulation: info@bpl-business.com

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September Channel Forecast - Harnessing marketing trends for advantage

Marketing is fundamental to business success and in today's fast-paced technology, channel, and customer landscape it requires an ever more multi-faceted yet balanced approach.

In this Channel Forecast insight session marketing leaders unravel the trends, challenges and opportunities redefining the marketing function, and bring to the surface the most important action points for the channel's marketers to consider.

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Growth focused CEO take

Former Logicalis and Sapphire Systems CEO Vince DeLuca is wasting no time in performing critical actions as incoming Six Degrees CEO, doubling down on the imperative to evolve with the times with an emphasis on AI opportunities, a more service-oriented approach and driving unprecedented growth in the MSP's heritage solution stack.

DeLuca was appointed Six Degrees CEO in June and quickly focused his energy and attention on growth and, to a strong degree, an AI-driven solution model having recognised the need to evolve with the transforming technology landscape. "In three years time I want to show a CAGR in the 10-15 per cent range on top line and very healthy margins with a set of technologies that are ideally suited to the market," stated DeLuca. "This means being ahead of the curve with our growth, being ultra-relevant with our technologies and keeping customers at the forefront."

Six Degrees currently generates around £80 million revenue and has a 400-ish headcount. Its 850-plus customers include mid-market businesses in

the finance, legal, retail and manufacturing sectors; and DeLuca noted that the MSP is experiencing consistent demand in the key focus areas of cloud, cyber, connected workspace, data and AI. "Even more positive is that we continue to see good demand for our heritage products including comms, connectivity and colo," he added. "That's a great combination and shows that we're on the right growth path."

DeLuca has set about immediately optimising Six Degrees' traditional products while at the same time strategising how the company will position its next generation of solutions. "In the medium term it's about enabling us with AI," he explained. "Six Degrees is missing a strong data and AI position, so one of my first tasks will be to



Vince DeLuca

The rapid organic growth demonstrated while I was leading Logicalis plays right into the journey we're on now

infuse this into our product lines. The second point is growth. I want everyone across the entire organisation to understand that our main goal is to grow. I'll assess how work is carried out internally to improve everything we do, and put

the vehicles in place to drive further growth across goals, strategies and objectives. This will happen quickly but it will be a team effort."

His first job to address is to make sure that the right people are in the right

places and to familiarise himself with all aspects of the business. "My first task will be to look at the organisational structure and ensure that we have the right foundation in place," he said. "The focus should always be outside-in, so I also want to



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es Six Degrees helm

spend time understanding Six Degrees' customers to learn what works for them and what doesn't. It's the combination of absorbing all of that data – more externally than internally – that enables you to formulate an organisational structure designed for growth."

Optimising margins and ensuring growth are the key dimensions that have to be

When I look at our relationship with Microsoft, I want to be doing far more than just reselling. I want to be co-developing and co-selling

understood by anyone in the ICT channel, noted DeLuca. Good partner strategies are also important, particularly leveraging technology partners in a different way to the traditional resell partnership format. "When I look at Six Degrees and our relationship with Microsoft, I want to be doing far more than just reselling its technology," he added. "I want to be co-developing and co-selling with Microsoft. It's not about

devaluing resell, but looking at it through a different lens, particularly with AI, to build more of a service orientation into the customer base with a healthy value-based set of capabilities."

In terms of AI, noted DeLuca, there is a growing number of offerings available right now that he is carefully considering. "There are some natural intersections

with many of our product lines," he commented. "For example, cloud and AI coming together and data-centric workloads. Because we're deeply embedded in the Microsoft ecosystem we also need to think about how Copilot plays into our portfolio and how we use it internally. These are the trends that will completely shape our

future and we need to be specific about what we're going to do. I want to use AI to deliver unique value-based services. And in the longer-term, we need a platform where customers can consume those services easily which will also open up a whole host of new opportunities. The pace of change is huge and we need to be out in front."

Striking the right balance of technology partners is

also key. The company is a Microsoft Azure Expert MSP and works with many other organisations including Fortinet, LogicMonitor, VMware and Acronis. "We support our customers with their digital transformation initiatives, enabling them to operate securely in the cloud," added DeLuca. "Technology partnerships are therefore a vital part of our company's ecosystem."

Leadership

DeLuca became a lynchpin in the Six Degrees ecosystem when company owner Charlesbank identified him as the business leader best able to keep the MSP on track and create long-term value. If you were to hear DeLuca speak you'd soon realise that he is American, but steeped in the British way of working. Having been tapped on the shoulder by Charlesbank, he grasped the Six Degrees opportunity with both hands and is building on past leadership experiences including spells at Marconi and Infocrossing before becoming Logicalis Chief Exec and then CEO of Sapphire Systems.

"The focus at Logicalis was on services across infrastructure like comms, cloud and collaborative technologies," stated DeLuca. "I have a strong foundation in this technology and leading an organisation through the conversion from pure play reseller to much more of a service-oriented, scalable and professional managed service provider in the solutions space, which is what we're doing at Six Degrees. The rapid organic growth demonstrated while I was leading Logicalis plays right into the journey we're on now."

Just a minute with Vince DeLuca...

Role model: My dad... a second generation Italian immigrant who inherited a grocery business from his father. He's always been an inspiration to me and I am incredibly proud to be his son.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I am a people-focused leader with a strong agenda to push a business forward. I've seen many people go one way or the other... too cut-throat or too nurturing without driving the agenda. My strength is finding that balance. But I would like to work quicker. Not impulsive, but at a consistent high degree of urgency.

Three ideal dinner guests: Nelson Mandela to understand what he went through and how he managed to lead a nation under so much scrutiny; Michael Jordan, simply the best of the best; and my grandfather – he lived an incredible life.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I wanted to be a doctor. It's people-centric and focuses on helping people and that resonates with me.

Your favourite comedian or comedienne? Kevin Hart.

Best advice you have been given: 'Don't surprise me'. My first manager said this to me just before I showcased a big presentation. He said, 'If you surprise me, you don't know your business well enough to have a handle on it to accelerate what you need to push, or fix problems'.

What talent do you wish you had? To perform music on stage to thousands of people – watching Glastonbury on TV inspired the inner rock star in me.

The biggest risk you have taken: Accepting my first CEO job. With a heavy focus on resale, the company I ended up working for was very different and much bigger than anything I had tackled beforehand. But I was successful, taking the business from \$400 million turnover to close to a billion.

How do you relax? Playing golf, but that's only relaxing if I'm doing well! I also love music and spending time with family.

Your biggest career achievement: Early in my career, and through perseverance, I took the consumer of a technology product from point-blank not wanting to talk to me to having them want more with high fives and hugs.

One example of something you have overcome: A fear of public speaking. I overcame this by learning that the better grasp I had on the subject matter, the more confident I felt. Over-preparing definitely helps.

In three words, what are today's top leadership priorities? Vision, tenacity, people.

If you could change any aspect of the tech revolution what would it be? We can be too tethered to technology. It's important that we find a way to harness tech while still valuing the human element.

Top tip for resellers: All businesses need to weigh up increasing margins versus growing the business. This will depend on market conditions and cycles, but there comes a time when you will need to major in one of these two areas. Margin is important, but growth is the most important thing we have right now. I would encourage resellers to look through both of these lenses and find where their own business focus is. This is especially important if they're private equity owned.

Editor's comment

HAVING a firm grip on what's coming down the tracks is essential to being ahead of the curve. But it's one thing to identify emerging trends, and another to act on them and chart the right course in the midst of change. Six Degrees CEO Vince DeLuca is brimming with this capability and quickly addressed his priorities with purpose and energy. The strategic insights he shared with us in this interview provide food for thought for all MSP business leaders.



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Teamwork: Building a Long-Standing Team Over 20 Years

As we celebrate Eclipse Wholesale's 20th year in business, I've had the opportunity to reflect on the past two decades and truly understand what has driven us forward over this time. The answer is - my team. They are at the core of everything we do, they are the cogs that keep this machine going. I'd like to dedicate this month's Channel Corner to them and share some advice and tips about team building that I've picked up over the years.

One of the most significant lessons I've learnt is the importance of hiring the right people. Although skills and experience are essential, it's the attitude, motivation and cultural fit that truly make the biggest difference in the long run. Skills can be taught but a positive attitude and willingness to learn are invaluable traits that will help your team thrive and grow together.

Leading on from that, investing in my team's personal and professional development is crucial in helping their growth. As a graduate of two degrees myself, I am passionate about encouraging my team to pursue further education, training courses and workshops to develop their skills and knowledge.

I am proud to say that Eclipse Wholesale has staff that have been with us for over 10 years. To achieve this type of retention you need to create a positive environment. At the end of the day, it boils down to whether they enjoy what they're doing and like coming into the office. Walking into a happy, collaborative place of work every day encourages open communication and builds trust, ultimately benefiting the business.

Your team's hard work needs to be recognised and rewarded. This can be carried out on a day to day basis with a simple thank you or holding reviews with a more formal approach. Hard work deserves a reward and recognising this will allow your team to feel valued and a sense of accomplishment.

Building a long-standing and committed team is not something that can be done overnight, it requires ongoing effort and dedication. I've highlighted just a few ways this can be achieved including hiring the right people, investing in development, creating a positive environment and rewarding your team. By focusing on these areas, you can build a team that is motivated, engaged and loyal.

Key takeaways:

- ✔ Prioritise attitude, motivation and cultural fit in the hiring process – skills and experience can be learned.
- ✔ Encourage personal and professional development with further education, training courses and workshops.
- ✔ Create a positive work environment that allows for open communication and building trust.
- ✔ Acknowledge and reward your team to boost motivation and morale.

Read More Here



Responding to market change

Here, Matthew Worboys, Business Development Director – Channel, Gamma, identifies the priority catalysts driving industry transformation and urges resellers and MSPs to be strategically responsive to the channel's multi-faceted change agenda.

Knowing how to respond and adapt to market change will help ensure that channel leaders are not outpaced by industry transformation. But to successfully shift the pace of change within organisations it is vitally important to understand how the channel's growth drivers are evolving, noted Worboys, who cited technologies like 5G, cloud services, UCaaS, CCaaS and enhanced security solutions as being key.

"To stay competitive, channel businesses must expand their portfolios to include these emerging technologies," he stated. "5G, for instance, will significantly enhance connectivity and speed, opening up new opportunities for innovation. Cloud services are attractive because of their scalability and efficiency, while UCaaS and CCaaS offer seamless communication solutions essential for modern business operations."

Moreover, noted Worboys, security remains a critical focus as cyber threats increase. "It's also important to keep an eye on the IoT, with Gamma's offerings expected in Q4," he added.



Matthew Worboys

"And MSPs should explore ways to monetise AI to drive revenue. Investing in training, forming strategic partnerships and focusing on delivering a superior customer experience will be crucial for success."

Overcoming barriers

The primary barriers to positive change identified by Worboys include technology complexity, regulatory constraints and the need for effective customer feedback mechanisms. "Agility and partnerships with vendors that offer diverse solutions are essential to adapt quickly to regulatory changes," he added. "Establishing robust channels for customer feedback to guide continuous improvement is also crucial, alongside simplifying technology benefits and offering clear pricing which can help win customers."

To secure a brighter future, resellers and MSPs would also be wise to focus on prioritising sustainability initiatives, improving customer experience and driving digital transformation with an emphasis on the digital 'switch-on' in early 2027, observed Worboys. "By focusing on the digital switch-on resellers can accelerate the process of transitioning customers from legacy systems to next generation services," he added. "This includes the adoption of cloud services supported by faster connectivity, which streamlines operations, reduces costs and enhances service delivery. Improved digital platforms and APIs are also driving better service delivery and integration."

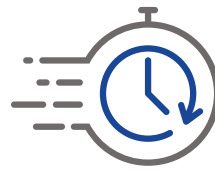
Another key to achieving sustainable success resides in adapting to and leading the Net Zero agenda, pointed out Worboys. Given the need to link Net Zero planning with the supply chain he suggests that the channel requires new ecosystems that jointly focus on sustainability and digital transformation. "Resellers should choose partners that prioritise sustainability to align with their own Net Zero goals," he added. ■

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The making of an MSP

Helping to solve end users' critical business issues through technology in the most advantageous way means becoming a Managed Services Provider, according to Espria CEO Clinton Groome. Here, he shares insights into how the MSP was created and will continue to deliver maximum value.

Groome co-led the merger of three firms to create Espria, which began life when Mode Solutions (then synonymous with print) acquired comms firm Nix in 2019 and rebranded to Mode Communication with backing from PE house Connection Capital. In 2022 Mode acquired IT and cloud business EACS and the group was rebranded as Espria, backed by Blackrock as well as Connection Capital.

"The Nix acquisition boosted scale and geography," stated Groome. "To bolster our go-to-market we decided to acquire EACS which enhanced our Microsoft, security, storage, data and apps reporting play. We then pursued a wider strategy and went to market with two contact centre offerings to build on our UC proposition. In the long-term, we'll be investing in the growth of contact centre and omnichannel solutions and evolve our cloud offerings for Azure and Microsoft

365. Our immediate goals include creating a more succinct portfolio of services while maturing the areas we're already great at. We're also focused on our sustainability strategy which is key to the future success of the business."

Espria offers a number of solutions in the comms, document, cloud and IT space – ranging from being fully managed to break-fix across UCaaS, CCaaS, security and Microsoft offerings. Its key partners include Gamma, Pragma, Microsoft, Sophos, Mimecast, NetApp Xerox and Ricoh.

Espria works across all sectors and industries, has a 145 headcount and is forecasting circa £30 million revenue this year. "The key focus will be on winning net new business with customer seats varying from 50 to 5,000," added Groome. "We're also seeing steady growth with Gamma and Five 9 contact centre, the iPECS solutions via Pragma and growth



Clinton Groome

We are also considering a true multi-cloud with greater focus on choosing the right platforms for each workload

in the CSP Microsoft and security space. Plus we've seen an increase in requests for support around data and apps as part of preparations for Microsoft Copilot. The new technology areas on our radar screen include SASE, MDR and XDR."

Solutions focused

Groome characterises Espria as being 'solutions-driven', aiming to make businesses operate more easily and with greater cost-efficiency, while at the same time reflecting key technology changes. This encompasses a shift in the way managed services are

delivered from traditional infrastructure support to a DevOps-oriented model, which Groome will consider as cloud offerings evolve. "In addition to our enterprise-as-a-service approach we are considering a true multi-cloud with greater focus on choosing the right platforms for each workload," he said.

Groome is aiming to grow all areas of the business, particularly in the contact centre and omni-channel space with customers taking more services. He also plans to acquire a network company to complement the MSP's wider offerings.

"The most significant priority is the continuation of relationship building across customers and vendors," stated Groome. "This will ensure that Espria is driving the right culture and providing the right managed service wrap." ■

Editor's comment

MSPs not only address end user demand for value-building outcomes, they also take client engagement to a new level with the acceleration of positive outcomes a growing priority. It is therefore important for traditional ICT providers with an eye on the future of their business to consider how they will fare against the evolving MSP model which will surely dominate.



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Capabilities now key

The most successful channel firms will adopt strategies that address the customer and employee experience challenges facing businesses through a capability and consultancy powered approach, according to Ali Hastings, Senior Director and Regional Channel Leader, Avaya UK&I.

Working alongside clients to overcome their customer and employee experience challenges makes the difference between achieving business growth or losing out, believes Hastings. "You can't survive today if you're just a reseller of technology, you have to upscale and become more capable," she stated. "Our partners are becoming SIs or MSPs. They're transforming to provide thought leadership and consultancy services or building out their own services organisations so they can bring best-in-breed technologies together under one solution."

Hastings noted that many partners are still selling UC lines and maintenance contracts, and that they might be OK for now, but that market is being commoditised. "The real opportunity is in helping companies, and large enterprises specifically, evolve while still protecting

their existing investments – helping them innovate with platforms that provide all the features they need to reach their business goals," she added. "It's about investing in the CX and AI space to provide differentiation and innovation in an overall solution that brings value to customers both internally and externally – that's what's driving growth for the channel."

Capability building
MSP capabilities are essential for building and delivering services that provide better outcomes for customers, and Avaya is working more closely with partners that understand the value that can be jointly delivered to customers. "These partners are winning and getting ahead of the curve," added Hastings. "Being a traditional reseller that just sells technology boxes is a barrier to positive evolution. We're in a new world now."

To support the development of its top CX partners Avaya



Ali Hastings

It's not about reselling tech. It's about investing in the CX and AI space

is building out bespoke customer experience lab environments in the UK, giving partners access to the Avaya Experience Platform and enabling them to integrate their own solutions, APIs or other integrations. "Partners can build specific use cases," said Hastings. "It's more powerful to partners than spinning up a website and running a demo on a laptop."

According to Hastings there are three main action points for resellers wanting to build their capabilities: Understanding the customers' needs, investing in domain expertise and investing in the platforms that truly deliver

our partners are having to become experts and consultants. It's not about reselling technology now."

Hastings also pointed out that Avaya's strategy is guided by a holistic approach to the challenges of meeting or exceeding customer expectations, and attracting and keeping the best talent. This holistic imperative displayed by Avaya includes positive momentum in other key areas of importance for the channel, notably around Net Zero initiatives. "Many contracts and RFPs have sustainability requirements attached to them," she added. "We have set near-term company-wide emissions reduction targets in line with climate science, and our targets have been validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) which classified Avaya's Scope 1 and 2 target ambition as in line with a 1.5°C trajectory."

As of FY2023, Avaya reduced its Scope 1 and 2 (market-based) emissions by 33 per cent and its Scope 3 Economic Intensity by 50 per cent from a baseline year of FY2020. "We continue to identify opportunities to use energy more efficiently, and going forward, we plan to work with our supply chain to further lower emissions," added Hastings. ■

Editor's comment...



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A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders conducted last summer brought into question whether the channel ecosystem could be more effective at turning market opportunities into growth. Nearly 90 per cent of resellers/MSPs think they have a competitive edge but 60 per cent are not maximising opportunities. Download the free Technology report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-technology>

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Leading in an age of cons

Westcon-Comstor's core purpose is clear – to catalyse channel growth as much through collaboration and trust as harnessing technology trends and solutions like cloud marketplace ecosystems, cyber and data, according to Rene Klein, Executive Vice President, Europe.

The pursuit of channel growth and the development of partner organisations is woven through everything Westcon-Comstor does, from driving cloud model innovation to advancing sustainability goals. From a tech perspective, its current growth is underpinned by strong performances in the key technology domains of cybersecurity and networking which, combined, accounted for 89 per cent of revenue in FY24. Cybersecurity was particularly buoyant with revenue growing 17 per cent to reach 42 per cent of the total revenue mix. Initiatives such as the company's 3D Lab – which allows multi-vendor cybersecurity solutions to be tested against specific use cases in a virtual demo environment – continue to be a point of differentiation, according to Klein.

The increasing importance of cybersecurity as a growth engine for the channel

is complemented by the rise of hyperscaler cloud marketplaces, which Klein says has been one of the defining tech trends of recent years and is reshaping how end users procure and deploy software. "The rise of AWS Marketplace in particular is leading end users across enterprise and SMB to change their purchasing behaviour in favour of the pre-defined budgets and flexible pricing on offer, including the ability to leverage AWS credits and retire spend commitments," stated Klein. "This has implications for the channel."

Westcon-Comstor's AWS Marketplace programme enables partners to transact key elements of its cybersecurity and networking portfolio across multiple vendors via private listings on AWS Marketplace as part of an end-to-end sales process. "The opportunity is there for the channel to be at the centre of the cloud



Rene Klein

As a sector we need to acknowledge and shout louder about the huge role we all play in bringing new technologies to market, driving scale and unleashing innovation

marketplace ecosystem which is only going to grow in size and strategic importance over the coming years," added Klein.

Speedy deals

He pointed to research house Forrester which found that channel partners selling in AWS Marketplace can close deals up to 50 per cent faster. Meanwhile, Canalis predicts that global sales of third party vendor software and services through cloud marketplaces will hit \$45

billion by 2025, up 84 per cent CAGR over five years. Klein also noted that partners are well equipped to tap into these growth markets.

"If you look at the megatrends of our time, from cloud to AI and security, partners have unparalleled expertise and insight," he commented. "Channel partners are at the heart of the technology ecosystem and their level of expertise and knowledge is, in my opinion, higher than it

has ever been. As a sector we need to acknowledge and shout louder about the huge role we all play in bringing new and exciting technologies to market, driving scale and unleashing innovation.

"Of course, this level of understanding can always be deepened and strengthened. And the greatest barrier to innovation is resistance to change and a tendency to continue doing things in the same way purely out of

Fast-forward to innovation



stant evolution

habit and comfort. That said, across the channel there are many companies with a strong desire to embrace a more agile way of working, rooted in innovation and that willingness to 'move fast and break things' that we've seen in Big Tech."

Westcon-Comstor's own research shows that partners feel a particular need to become more sophisticated in their use of data to maximise cross-sell and upsell opportunities and drive adoption of new products and solutions. Almost all respondents said data was a key investment focus for the next 12 months, with a perhaps surprisingly high 70 per cent stating that they already have an in-house data and analytics function.

"The willingness to invest in data capabilities demonstrates a recognition among partners that data analysis can help them accurately identify customer segments, predict buying behaviour and offer proactive customer support, leading to improved customer satisfaction, retention and sales," stated Klein.

Key challenge

But the research also shows that access to the right data is the biggest obstacle facing partners in their pursuit of recurring revenue models, and that deploying data effectively is a challenge for many partners. "Handling multiple diverse data types emerged as partners' biggest practical challenge in the application and utilisation of data, with more than half of those surveyed highlighting this as an issue," commented Klein. "Therefore it is incumbent on those across the channel, including

distributors, to equip partners with the data and analytics they need to seize new growth opportunities and complete their journey to a subscription, software and services-based future."

Community building

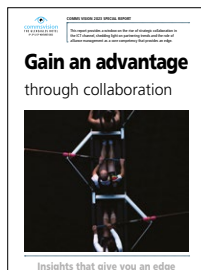
To make the most of the opportunities at hand Westcon-Comstor is also focused on building communities and shared learning. Its Tech ConneX initiative provides an interactive peer-to-peer platform that enables partner tech professionals to engage with vendors and Westcon-Comstor experts in a sales-free environment. They share knowledge, crowdsource answers to questions, connect with like-minded experts and build their own communities. This distributor-led, multi-vendor, tech-to-tech platform is open to members of Westcon-Comstor's exclusive opt-in Tech Xpert community which has grown to more than 2,300 participants across EMEA since its launch in 2022.

"The platform offers the ability to receive near real time responses to direct messages, Q&As and forum

discussions, find and connect with local peers, join vendor groups, develop skills and more," explained Klein. "Partners can develop their ability to better support customers and increase new logo wins. This community-based model involves a fundamental rethink of the traditional approach to how we do business and build relationships across the channel. Distributors operate at the heart of the value chain and are ideally placed to drive the creation of communities and shape the evolution of the channel."

Westcon-Comstor is also taking a more coordinated and joined-up approach to sustainability, working to reduce its carbon footprint while helping partners achieve their own sustainability goals. "Sharing our own experiences is a key part of these efforts which we are doing in the most transparent way possible," stated Klein. "We publish an annual report that gives a breakdown of our global emissions and details the key challenges we've faced. Such levels of transparency are vital to create the more sustainable channel that we all want to see."

Editor's comment...



IN A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders conducted last summer to support 2023's Comms Vision conference, almost 90 per cent believe that industry collaboration is essential to their future success and over 80 per cent think the channel needs to elevate collaboration as an absolute priority. Innovation, as a driver for strategic alliances, is set to increase significantly with 95 per cent of respondents expecting to shift their focus onto innovations that will provide a competitive edge. Westcon-Comstor's Tech ConneX community building initiative is a leading example of this trend in full flow. Download the free Collaboration report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-collaboration>

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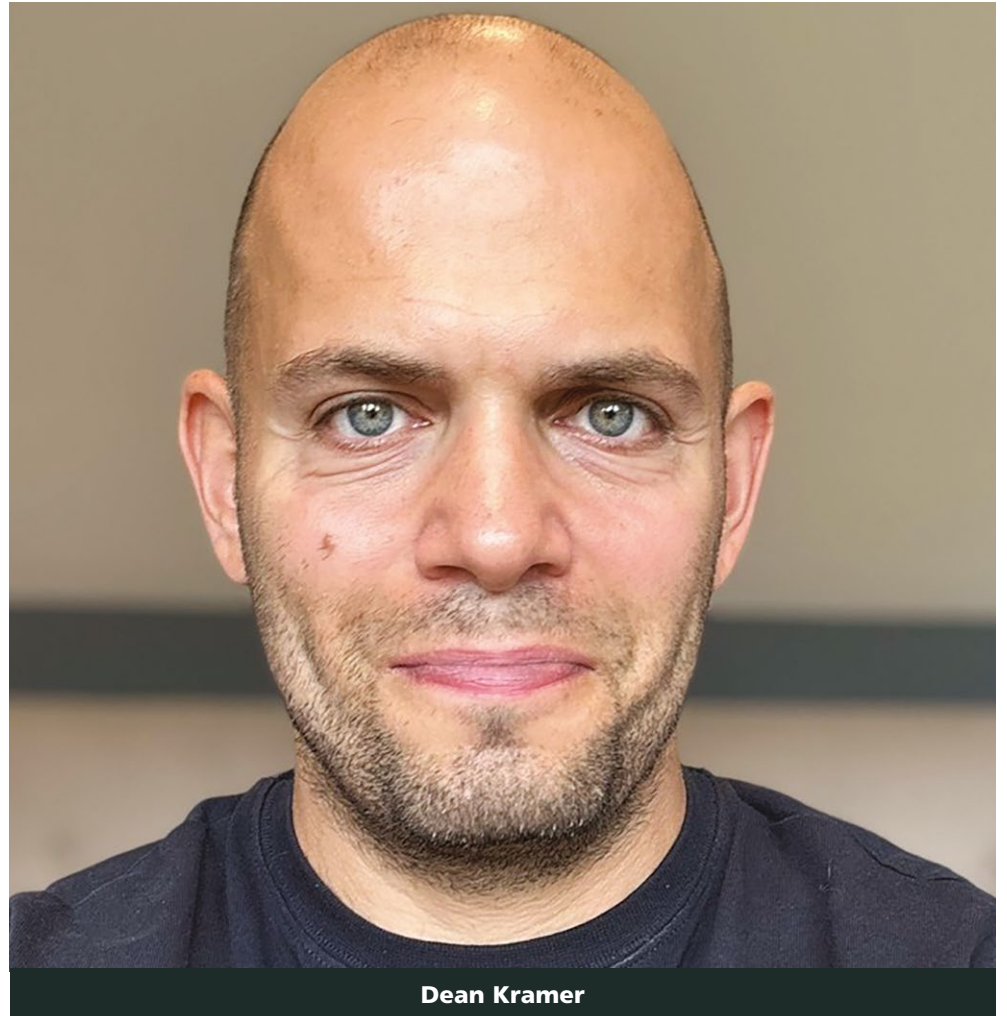
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Meeting the IT solution c

Currys Business has developed a comprehensive response to the supply chain requirements of partners wanting to adopt a complete IT solution model, tackling the challenge of bespoke account management and provisioning while designing a blueprint that responds seamlessly to market change – all vital for partner growth, according to Director Dean Kramer.



Dean Kramer

Currys Business' complete IT solution model provides an interconnected framework that specifically addresses all markets with clarity and precision, noted Kramer, who also believes that the company provides a striking example of a partner-driven approach. "We have the opportunity to be recognised further by partners as a complete IT solutions provider for businesses, an organisation already highly experienced in the subscription model for contracts and relationships," he stated. "We are now building greater awareness and understanding of our proposition and capabilities, and see significant headroom for partners to grow within the SME market."

There is comfort to be had from the backing of a

technology giant like Currys Business, which is part of Currys, Europe's household name electrical and telecommunications retailer and service provider. Kramer joined the firm in 2004 and has held many commercial buying, marketing and category management roles. For a spell he was responsible for the travel business and in November last year took charge of the B2B operation, including partner strategy.

The channel has long been a hot topic and priority for Kramer who aims to realise 'huge growth' opportunities for partners who recognise the increasing need to think more broadly about the products and services they provide. "The Currys Business hardware range includes products from Apple, HP, Samsung and many other global names,"

We have an opportunity to be more recognised by partners as a complete IT solutions provider for businesses, an organisation already highly experienced in the subscription model for contracts and relationships

explained Kramer. "We are well positioned to help partners widen their scope by leveraging our brand and relationships."

Currys Business has adopted a number of key practices to support partners' growth journey, underpinned by 30 years experience and a long-standing reputation for providing support. "We are experienced and ready to support partners with

all types of customer bases all from one account," stated Kramer. "We're developing new propositions – particularly our range of value added services and payment options – and have exciting plans across the board in the months ahead."

Kramer noted that Currys Business does not take a one-size-fits-all approach to partner relationships. But the on-boarding process is

'quick and efficient' via the portal where partners can place orders the minute their account is open. "A dedicated account manager is allocated from the outset and we customise the account management to align with the sectors each partner specialises in," added Kramer. "We have knowledge of many markets."

A key market is the mobile space and Kramer is currently

challenge

seeing great interest in multiple network choice. "We have several hundred partners who we help to serve the mobile airtime, business hardware and energy markets," stated Kramer. "Our channel strategy is based on encouraging partners to appreciate the benefits that they can gain from having one account with Currys Business covering all these markets with a dedicated account manager and support. That also includes access to a wide choice of mobile operators and major business hardware brands. Our reputation and strong relationships with leading mobile airtime providers is reflected in the fact that we were chosen as a launch partner by 3."

Big opportunities

Kramer advances an uncomplicated view of the big opportunities he sees for partners who offer a complete IT solution package and service to customers. He is equally clear eyed about the development and growth of AI, particularly its potential for future proofing, helping businesses bolster productivity and efficiency, and work more easily across borders. "Virtual Reality also presents increasingly compelling use cases for businesses, helping them create unique content to showcase experiences that are difficult to achieve remotely," he added.

"The new generation of AI powered devices will give customers and businesses new reasons to upgrade their technology to ensure they are maximising productivity and efficiency, and we aim to play a significant role in helping them do that."

Just a minute with Dean Kramer...

Role models: I've worked for (and with) some fantastic people and always try to take the best aspect from each to help me become a better person and leader.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I'm a massive Watford supporter, and have a season ticket with my son and dad.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I wanted to be a sportswear designer when I was young and would have a spin at that.

Best advice you have been given: To diversify my experience.

Three ideal dinner guests: Ricky Gervais for jokes; Muhammed Ali as I'm a boxing fan and he was the most charismatic; and Gordon Ramsey to critique how awful my food is.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I'm good at relating to people from different backgrounds and at different levels in the business, and I can simplify complex issues – but I need to work on my lack of patience when I see an opportunity.

What do you fear most? Snakes

Industry bugbear: Jargon and acronyms! We all have a role to play in making it easier to understand technology and connectivity.

The biggest risk you have taken: Stepping out of my comfort zone to take on projects has contributed to me thinking in a more rounded way about how we serve customers and bring propositions to market.

Your favourite comedians or comedienne: Ricky Gervais and Kevin Bridges.

What talent do you wish you had? To read and play music.

Top tip for resellers: Know your customer.

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Community approach un

Moving into managed services and building recurring revenues will prove pivotal in shaping the future success of comms resellers. And last month's Comms Dealer round table session hosted in association with ConnectWise sought to move the MSP agenda forward, addressing key challenges and bringing to the surface how go-to-market potential can be optimised through a community and collaboration led model underpinned by business intelligence, consultancy and best practice learnings.

Targeting the IT managed services opportunity is perhaps the best way for resellers to secure a hard-to-beat strategic advantage, but capability and knowledge gaps may prevent them from developing that competitive edge – and from achieving their growth ambitions. Nick Shepherd, Product & Marketing Director, Windsor Telecom, highlighted some of the practical challenges that resellers face when it comes to executing their MSP ambitions. “A challenge for us was moving from the traditional telecoms world into the IT space,” he stated. “We’ve done that through a mix of partnering and acquisitions, buying the skills needed to be an IT business – and lead with IT instead of comms.”

Another challenge for resellers is how to mobilise their potential to become MSPs through a well founded strategic plan from the outset, based on having the right insights. For Matthew Croxford, Managing Director, Citytalk Group, overcoming this challenge was a time consuming learning process. “We acquired a small local IT business for their skill set

and understanding, but we weren't familiar with how to talk to customers about managed services and bill them,” he explained. “We didn't have the right model because the policies and processes were not fit for purpose. Acquiring another business made us realise the mistakes we were making.”

Collaboration matters

To help MSPs overcome such challenges ConnectWise has long advanced a community and collaboration led model that addresses MSP go-to-market issues. For comms resellers, business intelligence and collaboration is an underused lever of growth acceleration and Sam Callaghan, VP, EMEA Sales, ConnectWise, believes that channel success hinges on learning, sharing insights and growing together.

“Our service leadership index analyses industry data across tens of thousands of service providers globally every quarter, benchmarking them around profitability and growth rates against over 200 KPIs,” he stated. “This tells MSPs where they sit in the benchmarking and how to improve, based on a 360 degree review of



Industry thinkers double down on strategies to empower the ev

MSPs taking a cyber-focused approach are growing four times faster than those that aren't, with a standard service growth margin of 60 per cent

the performance of their offerings in the marketplace and how their overall business is doing against peers. The data shows what

MSPs should be aiming for in terms of gross margins according to the best in class top 25 per cent measured on adjusted EBITDA.”

Education, knowledge and insights translate into strategic confidence and clarity of direction, providing a solid foundation for early



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locks MSP opportunities

through acquisitions," he commented. "Most of the businesses I look at are MSPs, but I've also looked at telecoms companies that aspired to become an MSP – almost all failed."

Managed services is a strategic priority for comms resellers with long-term ambitions, but slow starters are in danger of playing catch up with successful early movers like Pure Cloud Solutions. "We adopted cloud and the recurring revenue model early but did not integrate with existing networks," stated CEO Jamie Lake. "That was the foundation of our strategy. We were a Toshiba PBX house and had to invest heavily in educating PBX engineers to become network engineers."

"But we reaped the benefits. Our customers saw value in transitioning to the cloud and that made becoming an MSP more straightforward. However, we still had to acquire the skill set for the IT piece."

The bar for traditional comms resellers is rising as a growing number of end user organisations recognise, and demand, the benefits of a single supplier managed services approach. Therefore the requirement for resellers to reassess and reset growth strategies becomes more pressing.

For example, new technology solutions and changing buying patterns meant that Equity Networks' traditional, transactional go-to-market became redundant. "When we started selling hosted VoIP we got secondary requests to move customers' IT to the cloud, but we just sold

telecoms," said Managing Director Alex Hall. "We tried outsourcing but that proved to be naive, so we were forced into an acquisition. For us the move into the MSP space was more out of necessity than intent."

Moving ahead

Equity Networks' experience also shows us that comms resellers may face challenges when transforming their business model, but becoming an MSP will likely mean the difference between long-term success and failure and this potential make-or-break MSP transformation message is

Communication is the big issue here... how we communicate with customers on solving their problems

permeating through the reseller community. Carving out a new core operation of course has its challenges and can overstretch an ambitious reseller or fledgling MSP, which raises the question of how the channel can deliver this change and move ahead with confidence.

Against this backdrop, Callaghan reiterated that strategic consultation on how comms resellers and MSPs adopt IT managed services, including cybersecurity, is pivotal. He says ConnectWise's BrightGauge business intelligence resource provides a way for resellers to understand where they are today and chart a roadmap to realise their goals. "It answers the strategic questions of where you are now, your growth potential and how to get to where you want to be," he added.

Although BrightGauge provides a way for resellers and MSPs to cross-check their capabilities and growth with peers, and points the way to potentially gaining an upper hand, the expansion of capabilities also means refocusing product and service propositions, which can be another challenge. Despite the opportunity to evolve and increase revenue from managed services, most resellers and MSPs are yet to make the most of bringing complementary products and services into their portfolios. This hesitancy affects their overall performance and removes any opportunity

around multiple products, which requires upskilling," he said. "The opportunity is showing customers you can do that."

As we have seen, comms resellers wanting to evolve and progress into the MSP space are facing strategic and operational challenges, and require capability-driven flexibility to change their GTM approach. This, says Callaghan, is where ConnectWise's community and knowledge sharing approach can help MSPs maintain ongoing relationships with end customers. Richard Swain, Commercial Director, Force 36, explained the benefits of regular customer interactions. "Because we are across so many products it means our engagement with each and every customer is high touch, including cyber," he commented. "Relationships are always evolving with conversations about what customers can do next and different projects – whereas telephones are telephones."

Force 36 became an MSP in 2002 and has always sought to provide subscription services. But

Continued on page 20



olution of MSPs

stage and mature MSPs to secure a powerful edge. And Callaghan says putting knowledge and insight at the heart of strategic planning empowers comms resellers and MSPs to grow. This is important because according to Alex Heslip, CEO, Risc IT Solutions, a lack of empowerment in the comms channel is rife. "I'm looking to enhance capabilities

to fully capitalise on what Callaghan says is circa mid-teens year-on-year growth in IT managed services.

Aidan Piper, CEO, Welcomm Communications, hinted at why this hesitancy exists. "Our biggest challenge is multiple vendor relationships and putting a service wrap

Editor's comment...



A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders conducted last summer underlined that the complexity of today's business technology environment is placing a premium on a channel company's ability to collaborate with partners on strategy and learning. The research confirmed that knowledge sharing can help achieve a mutual competitive advantage, which

ConnectWise continues to advance as it extends its insight-centred channel collaboration activities into community building. Such trends bring into question whether subpar vendor partnerships will survive the course. Download the free Collaboration report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-collaboration>



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Continued from page 19 despite its pedigree Swain says human resources remains a challenge. "You're having to keep up with so many skill sets," he added. "Finding capable, qualified people is difficult. This is reflected in broader industry trends, especially with some of the larger customers we work with putting outsourcing back on the table. This suggests they've raised the white flag when it comes to resourcing and skill sets. We're being contracted not so much to provide help desk, but more of a third line infrastructure management relationship from customers that previously did not want to outsource their IT to us."

This development also shows that customers are

willing to pay more for the right services, and chief among them right now is cybersecurity, noted Callaghan. "Covid 19 sparked an eruption in demand for cybersecurity," he stated. "So we are investing in our own teams, partnering and acquiring to provide partners with an option to work with us."

"Security is probably our fastest growing line of service. MSPs taking a cyber-focused approach are growing four times faster than those that aren't, with a standard service growth margin of 60 per cent."

Shayne Grove, Director, Educational Services, Coconnect, has also observed rising demand for cyber skills.

"We have Cyber Essentials Plus but a lot of schools and trusts are demanding that we now have ISO27001 which we are moving towards," he noted. "Many tenders now insist on this."

Not surprisingly, according to Callaghan, ConnectWise's cybersecurity partner programme represents a high growth opportunity for the channel. "Partners who adopt the programme are not only growing faster they are more successful across all of our best in class metrics," he stated. "But it's not as simple as that – it's about cracking and understanding your go-to-market. Communication is the big issue here... how we communicate with customers on solving their problems." ■

More key points to consider...



Philip Morrissey, Finance Director, Lily Communications
The biggest opportunity is selling IT to the customer base, but the challenge is recruitment. Nobody's cracked that and those who do will clean up.

Michael Simmons, Strategic Sales Executive, ConnectWise
The biggest opportunity is AI. We're doing a lot with AI and RPA within the ConnectWise ecosystem and aim to leverage productivity gains in a way that's good for our customers.

Richard Swain, Commercial Director, Force 36
The challenge is differentiating ourselves from the myriad of commoditised services within the MSP space, and the opportunity is in new products and services like cybersecurity and educating customers about its importance.

Julie Bishop, CEO, IT Naturally

Our biggest opportunity is being a B Corp which makes us stand out not just to customers, but to employees too which resolves the recruitment problem. It has opened many doors for us.

Nick Shepherd, Product & Marketing Director, Windsor Telecom

Educating customers, and internal people, on new products and services is a challenge, especially our traditional PBX sales team. But therein lies the opportunity.

Alex Hall, Managing Director, Equity Networks


The biggest opportunity for us is rapid growth through consolidation, specifically businesses struggling to cope with the demands of modern IT. The challenge is preserving our company's value drivers and DNA as we grow.

Alex Larcombe, Director, Specialist Sales, Radius Connect


Our greatest opportunity is cross selling products and services – the biggest challenge is demonstrating the value we bring.

Ian Walker, Managing Director, Fifteen Group

We are seeing a couple of businesses failing and business confidence in the UK is still not there yet. The opportunity is in building multiple services and glueing them together with security.



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Graduates hail Big Goal

A nationwide five-a-side tournament, culminating in a finals day at St George's Park – the home of England football – on November 1st coupled with individual sponsorship of Street Soccer Foundation Academies across the UK, has created top-notch social impact opportunities for sponsors of The Big Goal initiative. More importantly, the project's central aim to change the lives of disadvantaged young people across the UK is working, as young Academy graduates and sponsor representatives were pleased to validate. Ashley Murphy, who participated in the Onecom sponsored Street Soccer Academy at Portsmouth FC's Pompey for Life, told Comms Dealer: "The coaches have helped all of us with our confidence and we've all grown as people."

Ashley now hopes to get into football coaching having gained better self-



Graduates from the Focus, Daisy and Elite Group Academies

belief and the ability to push himself alongside a group of 'friends for life' he has made through the Academy.

Onecom CEO Martin Flick said: "Onecom's roots are in the Portsmouth area where many of our team live and work. Raising money for such a worthy charity is important, but getting involved, meeting the people and seeing what value your experience can bring to improve young peoples' lives is priceless."



Giacom and Focus Academy players in action

Meanwhile, Paige Hawkes took part in the Focus Group sponsored Palace for Life Street Soccer Academy, based at Crystal Palace FC, and is set to continue her relationship with the club's foundation by volunteering for them. "I formed friendships with the whole group and felt very welcome and comfortable," she commented. "I was particularly proud of myself when I took part in the football side of things. The sessions on mental health also

helped me to overcome difficult times and develop my confidence."

Harry Elkin, Talent Acquisition Advisor at Focus Group, added: "Guiding our Palace for Life Academy group through workshops and engaging in networking activities not only allowed us to share valuable skills, but also highlighted the incredible potential within each participant. It's amazing to see how sport can be a catalyst for personal and professional growth."

Terry O'Brien, CEO of The Big Goal lead sponsor Giacom, added: "This is just a start. Believe me, The Big Goal can only get bigger." ■

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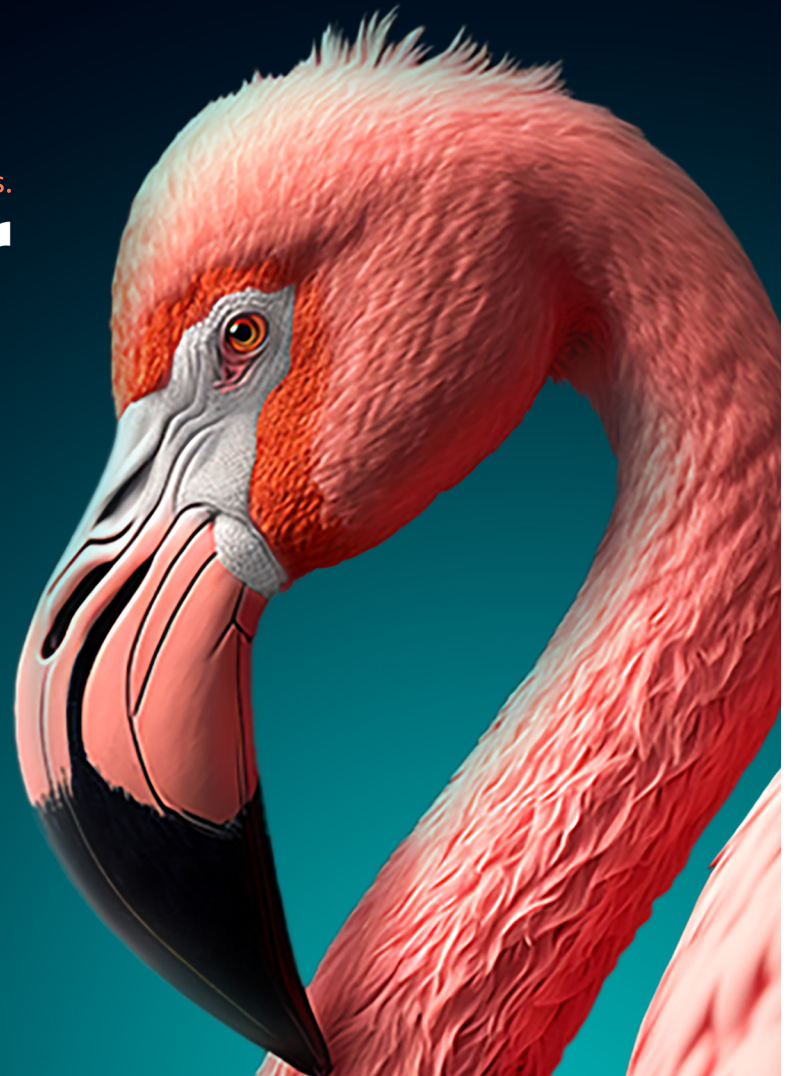
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Business success hinges on

A strong organisational culture unites the imperative for organisations to prioritise people development and wellbeing with CSR and the drive for better business outcomes, according to Sky Business Managing Director Stephen Hackley. Here, he discusses the catalytic role of culture in Sky's development and provides insights that would benefit all business leaders.

How far is culture the enabler of strategy and operations?

Strategy defines the direction and culture ensures that we get there. Just as business is changing, the culture of the organisation needs to adapt to these realities through looking at what part of our values and cultures need to be amplified at different times to reach our ambitions. Our data-driven approach ensures that decisions are informed by employee insights and aligned with our values. Understanding the cause-and-effect mechanism between cultural touchstones and outcomes helps us embed culture-building processes that deliver tangible results. This ensures that our culture is a cornerstone of our strategic and operational success.

How do you assess the strength of your culture and monitor progress?

We conduct annual people surveys punctuated with intra-year pulse surveys. We ask a variety of questions that allow us to measure various aspects of workplace culture, measure these over time, and analyse the data by segments such as department, gender, ethnicity and level of seniority to understand differences. We use this data to inform business and team action plans and our leader performance ratings incorporate our people scores. This ensures that management is kept accountable.

We are also piloting a new digital approach to getting inputs on specific topics, such as our culture, through a digital tool



Stephen Hackley

Understanding the cause-and-effect mechanism between cultural touchstones and outcomes helps us embed culture-building processes that deliver tangible results

called Sky Conversations. Scores always vary based on what's happening in the broader environment so there is always an opportunity to improve. Culture evolves, therefore requires ongoing attention to ensure it's aligned with our strategic goals and the needs of our people.

How do you align cultural priorities and values with workforce behaviours?

We have several initiatives to support positive workforce behaviours including our Sky Leader Model – a framework of what great leadership looks like – which ladders up to our cultural values. We also have a feedback

tool, Leader Lens, which measures the extent to which people leaders are showing up against the Leader Model. By integrating cultural expectations into performance management we ensure values are lived out in everyday actions. It's also important that our people feel that their work is

on cultural development

recognised and appreciated. Sky Stars is our recognition and awards programme, celebrating everybody who brings our values to life. It's a great tool for people to recognise their colleagues for their contributions. Sky Business also celebrates its people through the Shine a Light initiative, which highlights a colleague who has been nominated by one of their peers for their work.

When thinking about performance ratings we look holistically at how someone

By integrating cultural expectations into performance management we ensure values are lived out in everyday actions

approaches their job. This means we evaluate not just whether they have achieved their objectives, but how they've done this and if they have embodied our Sky values and behaviours whilst doing so. We regularly revisit our cultural ambition to help define what we should focus on over the next couple of years to support the delivery of our business priorities.

What are your current focus areas in terms of culture development and investment?

Last year we launched Sky Learn, our learning platform that simplifies and digitises the colleague learning experience. It's a social learning platform where people can like,

share and comment on content, as well as follow other employees, channels and groups. The platform includes a values channel that supports people to live by Sky values. We also invest in leadership development to ensure leaders champion those values.

Can workplace culture be leveraged as a source of competitive advantage?

Within the context of an external skills crisis, colleague development becomes a key lever for achieving competitive advantage. The skills we need to succeed are rapidly changing and their availability is under stress. We're not alone as 75 per cent of organisations are having difficulty finding the skills they require. So we've undertaken a piece of work to help us better understand the skills we have as an organisation, identify gaps and develop more talent internally.

Using external and internal research we have identified seven priority Sky Skills which are transferable and relevant to all roles across the organisation. Each skill has a senior leader sponsor and a learning pathway allowing people to use multi-mode learning to develop this skill.

How are you bringing your cultural values to life?

Mindsets and behaviours are important to a culture, so are the mechanisms, systems and processes that make it a lived reality. This can be seen in our end-of-year processes where we reflect not just on what was achieved, but how it was achieved. Our

recognition systems are based on our values and are an important reminder of what good looks like. Our listening strategies through surveys and 360 feedback provide data on what needs to be changed or amplified for our culture and people to thrive.

Leaders share stories through townhalls, newsletters and other channels to ensure they are visible to our people and their behaviour can be modelled at every level of the organisation. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for two-way communication so that our people are able to share their thoughts and feedback through regular feedback surveys and 'open office' calls.

How do you weave D&I into culture?

Our leaders have an important role to play in creating an inclusive culture. This needs to be driven from the top. Our leaders all undertake inclusive leadership training that provides them with guidance on how to model inclusive leadership in their teams and business areas. Having a diverse set of inputs, voices and opinions also enables leaders to make much better, more informed decisions. We want people to see, feel and celebrate in an inclusive culture – one where we all play our part. We're focusing on amplifying voices, building a community of change-makers and raising awareness.

And how can culture embrace Net Zero considerations?

Weaving Net Zero into any organisation's culture is about building sustainable choices into employees' everyday habits, making

Editor's comment...

IN A COMMS Dealer survey of channel leaders conducted last summer to support 2023's Comms Vision conference, nearly 90 per cent of respondents recognised that their culture needs to evolve, but just 50 per cent said they have the scope to give culture development the time it needs, and only 53 per cent had targeted their cultural development strategy on certain critical areas. Almost 95 per cent

agreed that organisational culture is key to survival, with 50 per cent of business leaders conceding that their cultural objectives only partially reflect the experience of employees and customers. Culture was confirmed as a priority leadership topic for 76.5 per cent of respondents, but 47 per cent have no plans to develop their desired cultural traits and behaviours, perhaps because they have not identified them. We hope the insights provided by Sky Business Managing Director Stephen Hackley in this article provide food for thought and action points that could help culture-challenged business leaders in the channel move forward with confidence.

Download the free Culture report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/whitepaper/gain-advantage-through-culture>

it easy to engage while providing training to increase understanding and awareness. One way we've helped to embed sustainability into our culture is by enabling our people to choose more sustainable travel and commuting options, including introducing a new car sharing scheme so that colleagues can travel in together.

Furthermore, in 2023 Sky launched School of Sky Zero, which is a bespoke digital training course that supports Sky employees to create positive climate-related behaviour changes by simplifying the science, educating about the world around us and inspiring employees to play their part.

What's key to developing a successful culture?

Keep it simple. Maintain a consistent narrative, flow the desired culture through your processes and ensure that leadership behaviour mirrors your values. It's important to set clear expectations when colleagues join the business through the induction process, and create a network of culture ambassadors that support colleagues to champion the culture at every opportunity. Culture is a journey that requires continuous effort, adaptability and a willingness to listen and evolve. By integrating good process, a little science and managerial will, we can create a culture where both employees and the business thrive. ■

Creating a platform for M

Resellers who reinvent their business model to meet the managed services requirements of SMBs will secure a long-term advantage, says Giacom COO Nathan Marke. He also warned that traditional resellers stuck on their current pathways will likely lose out to progressive rivals unless they also tap into the channel's historic ability to adapt.



Nathan Marke

Converging industry trends and the evolving demands of SMBs mean the future viability of traditional resale models in the channel is far from guaranteed, warned Marke. To underscore his point he spotlighted how growth is manifesting in the key technology categories. "There are opportunities everywhere across all categories, but the strong double-digit growth is in cloud software, cloud infrastructure, security and managed services," stated Marke.

SMBs, while upping their investment in cloud and security technologies, are also choosing to buy all their technology from a local, trusted provider rather than in a fragmented way as they have in the past. "They are looking for a strategic partner to manage their entire technology estate,"

commented Marke. "This is supported by recent data which shows MSPs are growing three times as fast as resellers."

While growth in telco areas is comparatively flat there is an uptick in the channel's market share. Currently, the channel holds 50 per cent market share in telco and 30 per cent in mobile. "There's a significant substitutional opportunity and Giacom's channel partners have experienced strong growth in telco of more than 10 per cent per annum," stated Marke.

"These overall trends tell us that traditional resale models and telco services will still generate steady growth. However, if you're looking to maximise business growth, then pursue the MSP route and incorporate more cloud and subscription services into your model."

Marke also noted that the services market is growing at circa four per cent this year, with managed services growing at eight per cent, whereas traditional break-fix resale models are growing much slower at circa one to two per cent. "This indicates that SMBs are less interested in break-fix support and are far more interested in managed services," added Marke. "We're moving from a one-off engagement model to a continuous engagement approach. This is the change the channel needs to make. MSPs that embrace this are also achieving significantly higher valuations compared to traditional resellers. It's a stark difference, and because you're building resilient, recurring revenue streams you're making your business much more valuable."

The profit potential enjoyed by MSPs has been catalysed by the increasing

We're moving from a one-off engagement model to a continuous engagement approach. MSPs that embrace this are achieving significantly higher valuations compared to traditional resellers

sophistication of remote monitoring and management software, observed Marke. "Managed services are based on the principle of data flow, monitoring usage, security posture and environmental conditions," he added.

Insight matters

"The key is to take that information and, using analytics, turn it into insight. You can then present the customer with continuous reports on their environment usage, cyber attacks that

have been prevented, licence usage and optimisation, as well as cost-saving opportunities. This helps the customer to gain more value from the relationship, shifting from a tactical to a strategic partnership."

The journey towards managed services provision poses a challenge for channel providers. However, Giacom anticipated the market with the acquisition of its cloud division and Union Street, enabling the company to

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ISP enablement

develop the product portfolio, software and capabilities needed to deliver converged solutions to partners. But whether resellers in general have a strong enough understanding of the issues and market trends reshaping ICT buying preferences today is still open to question. "It can be extremely hard for resellers to gain access to the right information at the right time," stated Marke. "Our channel community is made up of entrepreneurs brilliant at seeing opportunities and addressing them with products and services. However, this sharp focus can make it easy to miss wider trends, especially in an industry which is rapidly evolving. Taking a step back to examine the big picture is crucial – that's a value we can add."

Giacom shares valuable insights into UK SMB trends following its partnership with global management consulting business Analysys Mason, which keeps a close eye on SMB technology spend and usage. The firm combines primary research with traditional analytical methods and models to deliver its SMB Technology Forecaster, which provides a detailed look at the UK SMB market with information segmented by technology, business size and vertical.

Results suggest that the biggest barrier to MSP growth in the channel is skills, observed Marke. "The data indicates that reseller portfolios need to go broader and deeper to meet customer demand and expectations," he added. "However, it's difficult for resellers and MSPs to achieve this without hiring new people first, which is why

it's the biggest blocker to the channel growing faster. Many channel businesses address this through mergers and acquisitions, acquiring new skills that way, but not everyone can do this."

Growth acceleration

To plug the skills gap Giacom is poised to introduce growth accelerator packages that help partners to identify the biggest cross-sell opportunities for new products within their customer base. "We look for the most significant commercial opportunities and the low hanging fruit," explained Marke. "Then we build a business plan together on how to execute on that opportunity. We train their teams on how to sell and support the new products, build their go-to-market proposition with collateral and other marketing materials, then work with them on their customer base to execute a lead generation campaign. We also help partners to implement software tools and use our Cloud Market portal to streamline and automate operations, enabling them to scale new products and services effectively and without restraint."

According to Marke a partner can progress from not selling a product in the first month to having active customers by month four. "It takes investment from both sides, but by adopting this collaborative approach we're quickly overcoming this challenge and accelerating growth for partners," he stated.

Initiatives such as Giacom's growth accelerator packages build on, and advance, the channel's innate ability to

adapt and evolve. "Three years ago you wouldn't have seen the significant shift from telco resellers towards managed services and becoming familiar with the world of Microsoft, cybersecurity and similar areas," noted Marke. "The speed at which the channel is responding is incredible and highlights the adaptability of this entrepreneurial community. That said, many resellers are still uncertain about security and hesitate to engage with it, but they need to because it's front and centre in every conversation. Resellers must competently identify cybersecurity requirements and clearly articulate how security is baked into their solutions. This is an area where the channel still needs to improve."

MSP framework

Marke confirmed that Giacom is providing a framework for reseller business model reinvention across all categories including security, and that the company's aim is for 'every penny of SMB spend to go to the channel'. "The MSP model is the biggest opportunity to achieve this because SMBs want managed services," he added. "The opportunity is in enabling resellers to transition their model to subscription-based managed services and build security skills into their business, making them more strategic for SMBs. Yet we still see many resellers stuck in their old habits. While they may be experiencing growth they are missing out on significant opportunities. Over time, they will lose market share as their customers migrate to providers that are equipped to offer modern managed services." ■



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Evolving with the times

It's time for partners to tightly grasp today's priority tech trends and harness the potential of collaborative opportunities in the channel, according to BT Wholesale Managing Director Alex Tempest.

The shift to digital and proliferation of All-IP has elevated certain technologies as front-runners requiring immediate attention, noted Tempest. She also pointed to a need for UCaaS solutions to go further and advanced strong arguments for partners to align with the growing importance of AI and 5G, which featured prominently in research undertaken by BT Wholesale.

The study highlighted AI, 5G and UCaaS as major opportunities, most notably showing that 61 per cent of IT decision makers expect to make investments in AI over the coming 12 months. "Channel companies should therefore focus conversations on the network requirements that make AI adoption successful," advised Tempest.

"Meanwhile, hybrid working has changed the technology and business landscape, but to be effective IT decision makers need fewer applications and simplified ways to collaborate. However, our research shows that less than half of IT teams have a UCaaS platform. Again, this opens the door for partners to tap

into new revenue streams by educating customers on how to consolidate collaboration platforms."

Tempest pointed out that these changes are all underpinned by a need for faster and more reliable connectivity, which was cited by over three quarters of survey respondents – but less than a third of IT decision makers prioritise the shift to All-IP. "The channel knows why the shift to digital networks is important, now it's time to ensure that all end users understand the benefits too," added Tempest. "While most partners have been working towards 5G and All-IP adoption, customers still don't realise the urgency or benefits this will unlock."

In response to growing demand for expanded UCaaS solutions BT Wholesale has introduced value add features such as fraud management systems that block unwanted calls and call analytics software. This means that end users can consolidate multiple tools into a single platform. As well as the move to more value add offerings and the shift to digital networks, 5G and All-IP have become significant



Alex Tempest

The channel is a unique ecosystem that works best when all players cooperate

factors in BT Wholesale's strategic development, including how it works with partners to improve customer experience by boosting the speed, reliability and efficiency of its networks. "This enables partners to make more sustainable choices and move away from legacy infrastructure," stated Tempest.

Partner enablement

She reiterated that vendors have a responsibility to effectively enable resellers and MSPs. "Whether it's marketing collateral or upskilling account teams, partner programmes can deliver this enablement," added Tempest. "Given the huge changes taking place – from the move to All-IP to a shift to 5G mobile connectivity and automation – it can be easy for knowledge to

be siloed. However, due to relationships that have been nurtured over time, vendors can work more with partners to drive growth."

Tempest urges resellers to take advantage of these close-knit relationships and identify customer pain points. "One way is for channel companies to create an open forum for customer feedback," she added. "This can be facilitated through regular meetings and networking face-to-face or virtually. Any concerns or emerging trends brought up in these meetings should

then be addressed either by the reseller or escalated to a vendor to help shape solutions and services that truly work for end users."

Tempest firmly believes that the channel is a unique ecosystem that works best when all players cooperate – and in the context of achieving sustainability goals, industry collaboration is key to success. "Sustainability and Net Zero are top priorities for many channel partners so it is important to focus on building ecosystems that will enable a greener industry," commented Tempest.

"Sustainability is a complex issue and the channel needs new processes and ways of working. Collaboration is vital for this. Goals such as decreasing carbon emissions and recycling e-waste can't be achieved in isolation, so channel companies must partner with experienced and trustworthy vendors that can guide them through their Net Zero journey. Reducing the channel's impact on the environment requires a collective effort.

"I'm also encouraged by improvements in the industry's level of diversity, equity and inclusion. As a traditionally male-dominated sector it's important that we put initiatives in place to show that we welcome people of all genders, races and sexual orientation – and it's brilliant to see more representation." ■

Editor's comment

BT WHOLESALE'S research emphasises how important it is for partners to be in lockstep with the march of change. But success hinges on having the agility to respond effectively, which many resellers and MSPs may lack. This brings into sharp focus the growing responsibility of vendors to take a lead in bridging the channel's knowledge and capability gaps.



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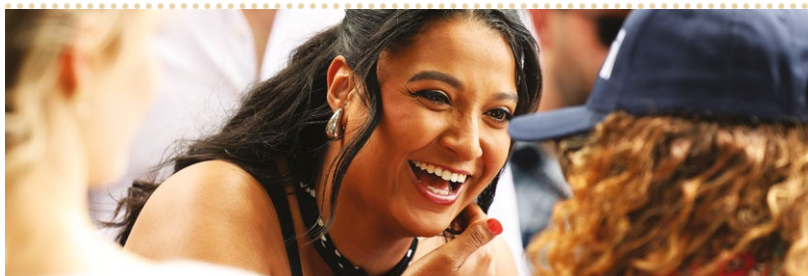
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The sun shines on the Channel Champions



The industry's top teams were celebrated at this year's Channel Champions Awards, held in the sunshine at Regents Park on July 4th, as Core Technology Systems scooped a hattrick of gongs including its Reseller Marketing Team winning Overall Team of the Year.

Big winners also included Fidelity Group who swept four awards and ANS Group and ProVu Communications who each secured a brace of commendations.

The ceremony followed a celebratory garden party and

was hosted by Final Score host and radio and television presenter Jason Mohammad.

The event recognises the often-unseen teams in channel organisations across the business and management spectrum including sales, marketing, technical, sales support, finance, executive leadership and culture

There were also special awards to recognise excellence in event management, apprentice schemes and charity work.

The Core Technology Systems team said: "Receiving the prestigious Channel Team of

the Year award, was not only a wonderful surprise, but an extraordinary accolade." We extend our deepest gratitude to Comms Dealer and the judges for this recognition, and to the whole Comms Dealer team and sponsors for such a fun event in a great location! We look forward to continuing to drive innovation and delivering exceptional service in the channel community."

BPL Business Media MD Michael O'Brien. "Thank you to all of our entrants, judges and sponsors for making such an event possible, namely Headline Sponsor Giacom."



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Integration capabilities

Establishing an integration capability enables resellers and MSPs to capture more deals, add greater value, differentiate and specialise. Even better, this capability can be achieved through a simple drag-and-drop. Here, industry experts explore how enriched integrations are providing a big boost to channel offerings.

Organisations are increasingly looking to leverage the benefits of connecting their technologies and applications together – to achieve streamlining and automation for example – and in responding to this demand TelcoSwitch has deployed over 20 integrations with other software solutions during the past 12 months. “Partners are unlocking new revenue streams and increasing customer stickiness and lifetime value by better enabling the end customer through their UCaaS suite,” stated Sam Giggle, Managing Director, Channel, TelcoSwitch. “Our data shows that those partners delivering rich integrations to customers are enjoying longer engagements.”

According to Giggle, the market is awash with solutions where integrations are cumbersome, feature poor, unreliable over time and complicated to set up. “Partners tell us that rapid deployment is core to getting the agreement to proceed in the first place, and one-click or no-code integrations are a huge enabler for them,” he commented.

Giggle noted that TelcoSwitch has worked with a number of other software vendors and solutions – from Vincere, to Slack, to PowerBI – in order

to integrate its CallSwitch One platform seamlessly. “Using a dashboard customers (or partners on their behalf) can instantly choose the integrations they want to use, click to login and authenticate, then they’re live,” explained Giggle. “For the partner, this approach avoids spending time manually integrating with other platforms, removes specialist knowledge requirements and is cost-effective.”

Differentiation

A growing number of partners are differentiating from competitors by specialising in niche vertical markets, pointed out Giggle. He also noted that much of TelcoSwitch’s integration roadmap is now influenced by partners with business cases that require integrations between the platform and software products core to specific customer markets. “This can represent a huge value-add that customers are willing to pay for, given the productivity enhancements they can achieve,” he commented. “These business cases have enabled us to be more focused in our development approach. We already have a healthy roadmap for this workstream which takes us into 2025.”

Partners seeking to maximise their integration potential



Sam Giggle

Our data shows that those partners delivering rich integrations to customers are enjoying longer engagements

would be wise to identify and double down on a handful of crucial areas that will drive the customer adoption curve, advises Giggle. “Ultimately, once partners know they can integrate with something the customer already uses, attention turns to how rich you can make the integration and how easy and quick it can be set up,” he commented.

Simplified customisation is essential for successful software integration, noted Justin Hamilton-Martin, Director of Product Strategy, Enreach for Service Providers. “While the potential is there to turn software integration and customisation into revenue, success depends on the ease of integration and accessibility – fortunately we are heading in the right

direction,” he stated. “We will see more marketplaces where vendors make their technologies readily available, and a rise in community-based solutions where people start to collaborate to find solutions, problem solve and share advice. Service providers and vendors may not drive those communities, but they can be significant contributors.”

API management

APIs are widely used across the industry and have an important role, observed Hamilton-Martin, but they must be used wisely. “While APIs are the base layer for integration they can also introduce complexity, especially for service providers and end users who want to consume only some of the technologies and features within a solution,” he explained. “Instead, a better approach is an accessible set of no code-based components – think of them as Lego blocks – that can be dragged and dropped into a solution as and when required. This is still API-based under the hood but delivered in an accessible, simplified way.”

Thus, service providers can more easily customise solutions for each customer (or customer category, such as a vertical market or user profile) without needing



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additional coding skills or significant investments. "However, they can add their own fine-tuning based on insight into their customers' needs, and accelerate adoption which brings value," added Hamilton-Martin.

AI interventions

This approach also means less dependency on skilled engineers to build and maintain solutions, which is an important consideration in a market where these resources are scarce. "Instead, support can be provided by non-technical staff or even via AI which can learn what a system does and automate the configuration for each user, with a project manager double-checking

that everything is correct," added Hamilton-Martin. "This is also in line with what consumers look for and increasingly expect. Many consumers, especially the younger generation, already see the value of AI which is taking the user experience to a new level. This brings us back to where we started: Software integrations that deliver customisation and differentiation will depend on technologies and approaches that are focused around simplified delivery and accessibility, with minimal heavy-lifting and complexity. Those are the critical attributes of a successful software integration delivery that can create tangible opportunities for all parties." ■



Justin Hamilton-Martin

A better approach is an accessible set of no code-based components – think of them as Lego blocks – that can be dragged and dropped into a solution

The challenge of whether resellers and MSPs can deliver true digital transformation including cyber resilience is becoming easier to resolve by the day. So much so that security can readily be added to all digital propositions, says CyberLab CTO Ryan Bradbury.

Ignoring the cybersecurity imperative is not an option for MSPs who are trusted by customers to manage and support their technology environments. This is because there is a critical link between tech and cyber, making it vital for resellers and MSPs to provide security in order to maintain those trusted relationships. This is particularly important because end users are becoming far more cyber-aware.

"Over the past two years organisations have become better educated and now want to proactively manage their cybersecurity posture," said Bradbury. "This has resulted in a huge increase of products that are now available to MSPs and resellers."

The availability of channel offerings, such as Cyberlab's addition of white label functionality to its flagship Control portal, enables partners to deliver automated cybersecurity tools with minimal onboarding and little if any ongoing effort, providing a readymade entry for MSPs into cyber. "We're seeing huge interest in the programme and are speaking to new partners



Ryan Bradbury

from a range of industries every week," said Bradbury.

Cyberlab's channel partners are able to resell every product and service it offers, removing the barrier to cyber-entry Bradbury often sees preventing resellers and MSPs from embracing a security play. "The biggest challenge I hear from MSPs is their struggle to break into the cybersecurity space with a lack of cyber expertise within their business," he stated. "The biggest opportunity for MSPs is to partner with a specialist cyber vendor and bring security into their portfolio, enabling them to add more value, realise more revenue and increase customer stickiness."

Bradbury is witnessing growing interest from end clients in training and phishing simulation, often due to it being a requirement

for insurance companies. Furthermore, the Managed Detection and Response (MDR) market is experiencing considerable growth against a backdrop of attack vectors such as ransomware, phishing and supply chain vulnerabilities continuing to compromise organisations.

MSPs must also fully assess the impact of AI on security postures, believes Bradbury. "AI will shape and define what the security space looks like and how MSPs protect their customer environments, but it will also enable attacks to become more sophisticated and targeted allowing the criminals to deploy, iterate and evolve much more efficiently," he stated.

Not surprisingly, security is now the primary concern for customers, so MSPs would be doing themselves, as well as their customers, a big favour by ensuring they can deliver and meet existing and new client requirements. "It is unlikely that new customers will not already have security tools in place, but we can't be afraid to displace these by evidencing a best-of-breed set of solutions that will add value and reduce risk," added Bradbury. ■

Altnets talk priorities

Maximising wholesale opportunities, portfolio diversification and closer industry collaboration are key to altnet success, according to industry leaders at the inaugural UK Fibre Summit (11th July, Forest of Arden Hotel and Country Club).

Wholesale strategies should be front and centre of altnets' future planning, according to Donal Hanrahan, Director of Strategy at Strategic Imperatives. To support his argument he pointed to a £490 million revenue opportunity for altnets able to match Openreach's 35 per cent penetration rate, achieved with a balanced portfolio of ISPs. "If altnets, with a current average take up of 16 per cent, can tap into the same strong and existing brands, then they have 19 per cent of their passed network to gain – around 2.4 million premises," he explained. "You will never please the vast variety of people passed by your network with just one ISP. Seek a set of complementary and established brands that provide choice and can leverage their customer relationships to drive migrations and limit network churn."

Market penetration is growing in importance against the backdrop of growing competition. For

example, Openreach's current 42 per cent overbuild of altnet networks is expected to hit 93 per cent in 2023. Hanrahan added: "Assuming a home costs £300 to pass and altnets connect one in every 6.25 homes, the cost to pass a connected home is £1,875, with a 9.2 year payback under Equinox 2 blended pricing. Conversely, for Openreach the actual cost to pass a connected home is £857, with payback coming in 4.2 years."

Ian Fishwick, Chairman at Airband, argued that wholesaling is not such a priority in rural areas with less immediate competition from monopolies and the incumbent. "The rural and urban case studies are very different and I believe make the term altnet redundant," he said. "Also, becoming cashflow positive is a common issue for everyone under the altnet umbrella and the race is on to get there as fast as possible."

To do this, diversifying portfolios to increase ARPU will be critical. According to Caitlin Johnston, Head of Strategic



Fibre experts discuss the hot topics for altnets

The message our industry needs to send out through the press and TV is that there is a massive investment happening. We need to work together and bang the drum for full fibre

Partnerships at Gigaclear, altnets transitioning from build engines to sales and marketing-led organisations are prompting a need for industry alliances. "Monetising networks and gaining customers are now the two major focus areas for fibre providers," she said. "These new priorities will require a fresh set of partnerships. As we become more customer-centric we must start partnering with suppliers that can pass benefits onto our customers. Looking from voice services to TV bundles there are lots of

opportunities in the diversity of products we can offer."

Diversification

Neil Wilson, Chief Product and Marketing Officer at PXC, agreed that new partnerships are key for altnets. He commented: "Diversification with complementary products is key to growing ARPU and margins. That is why we now sell Zoom and have moved into TV. We are constantly looking for the next products we can bring to the channel, and we need to make them consumable for our partners."

Dan Alvarez, CRO of VitriFi, noted: "When thinking about taking partnerships to the next level consider how you can be an enabler and add more value to customers. We are in the market of making peoples' lives easier with the Internet, so any product that can enhance this is something you should look to add."

Adding services is also a play for customer acquisition, not simply an ARPU booster for an existing customer base, observed David Barber, Strategy Director at Zen Internet. "The services to add should be reflective of the type of customers altnets aim to win," he said. "Consider your target audience and plan the services that will keep them sticky."

Awareness also remains a major issue in prompting take-up. Fishwick noted: "This is the largest single privately funded infrastructure programme the UK has ever seen (only HS2 is bigger and that was privately funded). We should be lauded but hardly anyone knows what are doing."

Spring Fibre Sales and Marketing Director Andrew Skipsey added: "The message our industry needs to send out through the press and TV is that there is a massive investment happening. The rollout was almost an undercover activity and therefore no one knows the critical service we have made available to them. For example, as Spring finished a massive chunk of build, our local MP called to ask when the build would be started. We need to work together and push for a national name to bang the drum for full fibre." ■

Moving the wellbeing dial

PlatformX Communications' (PXC) partnership with global wellbeing provider MYNDUP goes beyond traditional employee wellness initiatives, according to PXC Chief People Officer Aphra Brooks-Barnes who says the collaboration provides all-embracing holistic support for the many dimensions that underpin wellbeing.

Prioritising employees' wellbeing through a complete support framework should be the goal of all employers, believes Brooks-Barnes. She also pointed out that some approaches to wellbeing do not go far enough. "Wellbeing packages in industry have historically focused on insurance-based support around healthcare and life assurance, giving employees financial peace of mind when certain issues arise," she stated. "However, while this benefit will likely, and rightly, remain a consistent feature in company



Aphra Brooks-Barnes

packages it's not enough to support today's modern employees."

Comprehensive support

Brooks-Barnes says that PXC's new partnership with MYNDUP

fosters the right levels of support to promote wellbeing in and out of the workplace. "MYNDUP provides comprehensive and accessible services that are essential for an employer like PXC," she added. "It's important for us to provide a working environment and the resources that enable our people to thrive in the everyday and get the help they need quickly and easily in times of difficulty."

MYNDUP has identified an increasing number of areas that individuals need support in, including help with stress and burnout, returning to work, supporting neurodiverse colleagues and support in dealing with life's everyday challenges such as divorce, grief, fertility issues or menopause.

Brooks-Barnes cited KPMG's 2023 reward trends report which says wellbeing support has become the most important benefit for employees in reward packages, with 71 per cent

of staff rating it more important this year than in previous years. "While financial support will continue to help in this regard, offering full-spectrum, holistic wellbeing support including mental health and coaching sessions is a way to continue to attract and retain a high calibre of employees," added Brooks-Barnes.

The partnership with MYNDUP has been developed to support employees in two ways: Through an extensive resource library authored by qualified experts which addresses all aspects of wellbeing; and through one-to-one support with qualified coaches, counsellors and therapists whenever they are needed. Jim Sewell, Chief Revenue Officer at MYNDUP, added: "This is all supported by coaching programmes to ensure managers are confident when having conversations with their teams, as well as wellbeing education for employees all through one platform." ■

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Channel leaders create new



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CONOR
CALLANAN
CEO
CORE
TECHNOLOGY
SYSTEMS

I'M optimistic about the new Government's ability to support growth. It should also focus on enhancing digital infrastructure, boosting cybersecurity measures and promoting STEM education to bring equitable talent into the industry. Legislative changes to streamline tech regulations and provide incentives for R&D could also elevate the sector. Collaboration between the Government and industry leaders will be crucial in navigating this new chapter, particularly as AI development accelerates without strong policies in place for protection.



TOM SHIRLEY
DIRECTOR
FUTURE VOICE

THE previous Government initiated significant projects but there were gaps in connectivity and cybersecurity. Ensuring continuity in these projects is essential and Labour's focus on strengthening cybersecurity and accelerating 5G infrastructure looks promising. Enhanced cybersecurity regulations and increased R&D funding could significantly benefit our industry. Decisive and timely actions will be necessary to ensure sustained growth and resilience for telecom businesses. The new Government must prioritise modernising practices, such as expanding 5G coverage and ensuring all corners of the UK have access to high-speed connectivity.



STEVE BARCLAY
MD
EVE NETWORKS

THE focus on economic growth and European cooperation instils reasonable faith in Labour's potential to benefit our sector. Continued investment into digital infrastructure, plus data protection and security legislation is inevitable. Skills development programmes and funding for R&D could fuel innovation. I expect Labour will drive green technology which could position the UK's ICT sector as a world leader. Government influence through regulation is also crucial.

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Government wish list



ROY SHELTON
CEO
CONNECTUS
BUSINESS
SOLUTIONS

THE most immediate post-election impact is that budgets and projects have been unfrozen following election uncertainty. If economic growth can be achieved with increased tax income without raising tax bands, the future can be reassuring. In the past, the R&D tax credits and 100 per cent capital allowances encouraged investment but fell short of driving private sector tech investment. This gap presents an opportunity to incentivise technical apprenticeships to move to a cloud-first, always-on economy along with skilled resources for cyber counter-defences. One way to do that could be enforcing Cyber Essentials plus accreditation for companies of a certain size. There is also a need to harness AI in our digital economy without fear.



ADAM ZOLDAN
DIRECTOR
KNIGHT
CORPORATE
FINANCE

I would hope to see any investment in UK infrastructure support all competitors in the UK market. From Knight's perspective, we are looking at any changes in tax policy which could have a significant impact on our clients, particularly where Capital Gains Tax is involved. Our view is that CGT has been a key driver for shareholders to build value by continually investing in their businesses, and we hope that this is recognised by the Government. It was the last Labour Government that introduced Entrepreneurs' Relief so we would hope that the current iteration will remain.



ALAN STEPHENSON-
BROWN
CEO
EVOLVE BUSINESS
GROUP

LABOUR made a point to win over the tech community in its campaign by promising more investment and regulations to manage the development of emerging technologies. Despite Covid-19 and Brexit, its predecessor made strides in policymaking with the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act. Considering the impact emerging technologies could have on the economy I expect this Government to be just as active in this area. The party also promised to remove barriers to new data centres and the importance of the sector to the success of the UK's digital economy cannot be overstated, so it will be interesting to see how new policies work to boost data centre development.



CHERIE HOWLETT
CMO
JOLA

WHEN Governments invest in technology it presents opportunities for the channel. For example, as 5G coverage increases there is an opportunity to provide SMEs with high speed, reliable Internet access. When Governments invest in education we benefit from access to a diverse, well educated workforce, with the key skills we need to help us grow our businesses. At Jola, we benefit from apprenticeship schemes, sandwich students looking to acquire work experience and graduates looking to start their careers in telecoms. The channel has always been a significant source of economic growth for the country. I hope the new Government recognises the important role of entrepreneurs in the channel and continues to support them.



RICHARD BETTS
CEO
VIZST
TECHNOLOGY

THE Labour Government has discussed several initiatives to drive growth and innovation. These include the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill, plans to increase regulations around AI and the idea of transforming colleges into Technical Excellence Colleges to address skill shortages. There is also expected to be an increase in R&D across several industries to build on the great strides made by the previous Government. To take the sector even further, enhanced support and investment programmes for start-ups and SMEs will be a necessity. The overall effectiveness of policies will depend on their implementation capabilities, responsiveness to industry feedback and adaptability to changing economic conditions.



MIKE IANIRI
MD
CLOUD GEEKS

IF Labour prioritises digital infrastructure and technology, it could lead to positive outcomes such as accelerated 5G rollout and expanded broadband coverage. Conversely, any regulatory uncertainty or policy shifts could pose challenges. Ensuring a balanced approach to security and technological advancement remains critical, as is continuity in policies that promote investment and innovation. Labour could introduce more robust digital inclusion initiatives, implement stricter regulations to enhance competition, prioritise funding for R&D and strengthen cybersecurity measures.

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For full details of our awards and industry networking events visit.



Oliver extends role



Hilary Oliver

TOLLRING'S Chief Marketing and Experience Officer Hilary Oliver has been appointed Chief Customer Officer, extending her remit to become responsible for existing customer revenues as well as ensuring the consistency of customer experience and retention. Oliver joined Tollring in 2012 and four years later was appointed to the board as Marketing Director. She became Chief Marketing and Experience Officer in 2021. "Our customer success strategy focuses on customer retention, spotting opportunity, lowering cost of acquisition and driving consistency in engagement throughout all our routes to market," she commented. CEO Tony Martino added: "Hilary has been instrumental in ensuring that every aspect of our corporate culture, from the top down, is focused on the customer. Her expanded role will enhance our relationships with customers across all touchpoints."

Also on the move...

GREG Hawthorn has joined MSP Espria as Chief Technology Revenue Officer, bringing 25-plus years experience in delivering technology transformation and infrastructure projects across various sectors, with a particular focus on defining cloud strategy and leading architecture practices to support sales teams. He stated: "I am eager to demonstrate my skills and continue Espria's drive to commercially scale." CEO Clinton Groome added: "Greg's expertise in Microsoft cloud solutions and managed services forms a combination of customer knowledge and business insight, positioning him to guide Espria through our ongoing growth. From the development of revenue to sales and scaling, Greg will play an instrumental role in maximising value and revenue."



Greg Hawthorn

COMMSWORLD'S Human Resources Director Denise McDonnell has strengthened her influence in the business having joined the board. "I look forward to adding an HR perspective and voice to discussions at board level, using my skills and experience in HR from not only Commsworld but a wide cross section of businesses and organisations spanning a diverse range of sectors," she stated.

FORMER ANS Group Director of Technical Transformation Simon Saffidine has moved to Wigan-based provider of managed network solutions and IT services Evolve as Chief Technology Officer. Saffidine's previous IT leadership experience also includes a stint at UKFast as Technical Director. Evolve CEO Alan Stephenson-Brown commented: "Simon is an accomplished IT professional with a proven track record of delivering tailored IT and managed network solutions. His experience and leadership will be instrumental as we continue to innovate and deliver value to customers."

FORMER Redcentric Head of Communications Solutions Paul Tsang has joined MLL Telecom as Business Development



Paul Tsang

Manager – Health. MLL is a Health & Social Care Network (HSCN) Stage 2 accredited telecoms provider and a supplier on the Technology HSCN Access Services Direct Purchasing System (DPS) RM3825. "In line with the new Government's mission to make

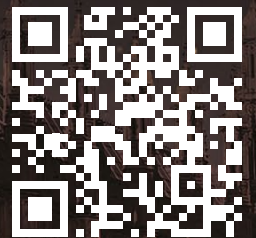
the NHS fit for the future, and with new technology adoption seen as key to enabling greater efficiencies and innovation in our hospitals and across primary care, MLL is ready to play its part," stated Tsang.

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